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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Nov. 25, 1864.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

[By the CHAIR.]

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT,

In response to a resolution of the House, of the 8th instant, relative to the special exchange of prisoners of war.

RICHMOND, VA., Nov. 24, 1864.

To the House of Representatives :

In response to your resolution of the 8th instant, I herewith transmit a communication from the Secretary of war, relative to the special exchange of prisoners of war by the Commissioner of Exchange.

JEFFERSON DAVIS.

COMMUNICATION FROM SECRETARY OF WAR.

WAR DEPARTMENT, C. S. A., }
Richmond, Nov. 21, 1864. }

To the President of the Confederate States :

SIR: I have received a copy of the following resolution of the House of Representatives, referred by your Excellency to this Department:

“Resolved, That the President be respectfully requested, if not incompatible with the public interest, to cause to be furnished this House with the names of all persons specially exchanged by the Commissioner of Exchange of prisoners; also, the time of their capture and date of exchange.”

In response, I have the honor to transmit herewith a report from the Agent of Exchange upon the points presented in the resolution of the House.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JAMES A. SEDDON,
Secretary of War.

REPORT OF THE AGENT OF EXCHANGE.

RICHMOND, VA., Nov. 18, 1864.

HON. JAMES A. SEDDON,
Secretary of War:

SIR: In the matter of the accompanying resolution of the House of Representatives, I have the honor to make the following report:

On the 1st of November, 1864, in my report detailing the operations of the Exchange Bureau, I used the following language in relation to special exchanges, to wit:

“An error respecting special exchanges seems to prevail, both amongst our people and captive soldiers. The Federal authorities, with a malignity congenial to them, in the hope of causing irritation on the part of our prisoners towards their Government, have basely and falsely represented to them that special exchanges are being constantly proposed by us. A long time ago I communicated to you the many grave objections to any such system. My views met your entire approval, and I have, accordingly, constantly refrained from making special exchanges, though frequently urged to do so. The officers and soldiers delivered to us were in all cases selected by the enemy, and those of theirs who were sent in return were designated by us. This was not a system of special exchange in any sense of the term. If the officers and soldiers sent to us had been specially asked for, or if their return had been caused by any special action of the Confederate authorities in their individual cases, there would have been ground for the belief that special exchanges were being made. The efforts of the Government have been directed to the release of all our prisoners without any discrimination in favor of particular persons. To have pursued any other plan would not only have showed partiality and favoritism where all have tried to do their duty faithfully, but would have given to the enemy the opportunity of making selections from their own prisoners in our hands to such an extent as would have precluded all hope of a general exchange. With very rare exceptions, I have never known what officers or men were on the flag of truce boat until I visited it. Under your instructions, all of our prisoners have been considered as occupying the same position, and each one on his return has been received with as much welcome as any other. I repeat, therefore, that no special efforts have been used to secure the release or exchange of particular persons, and every line of policy which would put any one of our prisoners in a more favorable position than that occupied by the others, has been carefully avoided. The published correspondence of this office shows the entire readiness of our Government to return an equivalent for any Confederate officer or soldier sent within our lines. Who that equivalent shall be, we have

reserved the right to determine, and when the selection is made and the party delivered to the Federal authorities, it is simply the return of an equivalent and not a special exchange. To refuse to return the equivalent, would be to doom our officer or soldier to hopeless captivity after liberty had dawned upon him."

In addition to the foregoing, I beg leave to state that I have been frequently importuned to procure the release of particular individuals amongst our prisoners at the North, by proposing to the enemy their exchange for any persons of their rank who might be designated by them. I have refused to do so in any case, for two good reasons. First, it made a discrimination amongst our prisoners. The enemy holding an excess of officers, such a rule, even if all the Federal officers in our possession had been sent North, would have left a large number of our people in prison. Those who were not selected, and their friends at home, would have had just cause of complaint against their Government for thus leaving them in the hands of the enemy, while others, with no better claims, had been selected for restoration to liberty. Secondly, such a proceeding would have enabled the enemy, in a very short time, to secure the release of such parties as they were anxious to relieve from captivity, and for whom strenuous efforts had been made by influential friends. If the enemy in this way had secured the release of some two or three hundred of their people, they would have cared very little about the fate of the others, and thus a general exchange would have been made hopeless.

For the same reasons, I have constantly refused to send Federal prisoners North on their parole to secure the release of specially named parties. I have, in some cases, even refused to recognize the special paroles of some Confederate officers who were sent home to secure the release of some particular Federal prisoner. In one case the Confederate officer was sent back into captivity. In others I have refused to send the designated Federal officer, and given some other equivalent. The Federal authorities perceiving our resolution in this respect, have for some time past refrained from giving such paroles.

Whilst I have ignored special exchanges, I have taken every means in my power to notify our prisoners at the North that we were not only anxious for their release, but were ready at all times to give an equivalent for any officer or soldier delivered to us, and at the time of his delivery. The only exceptions that I am aware of to the course herein indicated, have been the cases of the exchange of Brigadier General Kemper for Brigadier General Graham, in September, 1863, and Major Thomas D. Armesy for Major E. Goff, some three months ago. The first was proposed by the enemy and accepted because it convicted the Federal Secretary of War, before his own people, of gross falsehood, and in the other case the parties had been respectively placed in close confinement and in irons, one in retaliation for the other. Brigadier General Kemper was captured in July, 1863, and Major Armesy early in 1863. I further state that in cases of retaliation, where parties on both sides have been placed in close confinement or in irons, I have offered to make an exchange one for the other.

It was on this principle that Major Armesy was exchanged for Major Goff. I trust the exception of this class of cases from the general rule will find its excuse in the release from torture of those true and faithful men, who have served their country so well as to call down the special vengeance of our foe.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

RO. GULD,
Agent of Exchange.

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